

Safety Alert



Combat Lifesaver Kit Safety Alert SA05-005



HETASTARCH WARNING

The Combat Lifesaver (CLS) bags are now stocked with Hetastarch (Hextend®), instead of normal saline intravenous fluid. This fluid is a man made electrolyte solution that is similar to normal plasma. It is used in cases of trauma where significant blood loss results in low blood pressure (hypotension). Hetastarch is not a substitute for blood or plasma and works by pulling fluids from other tissues in the body and expanding the volume within the blood vessels. For that reason it can cause harm if used to treat heat injuries or dehydrated individuals. There have been several recent instances where Hetastarch has been used to treat troops who are heat casualties. No adverse outcomes occurred, but the risk remains and could be catastrophic.

A Combat Life Saver (CLS) is a non-medical Soldier that is trained to provide emergency care as a secondary mission when the tactical situation permits. The CLS is not intended to take the place of medical personnel, but to slow deterioration of a wounded Soldier's condition until trained medical personnel arrive. The skill the CLS possesses improves the survival rates on the modern battlefield. However, they do not have the training to decide what type of intravenous fluid should be given to a casualty. Current doctrine emphasis beginning intravenous access more than the administration of fluid to trauma victims, similarly the majority of heat casualties can be and should be treated with oral hydration.

Recommendations:

- BDE/BCT educate medics and CLS within the formation on the use of Hetastarch
- BDE/BCT ensure medics are placed at high hazard events e.g. field exercises
- BDE/BCT Surgeons evaluate the need for Hetastarch in the CLS bag. Consider distribution only to medics and those troops with additional medical training.



To identify the Hetastarch IV bag you must read the label. The text is a light blue and under low light conditions will appear to be black, similar to numerous other IV bags.

Contact your BDE/BCT Surgeon or the Division Surgeon for additional questions.